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**ALDA'S LEAP.**







WILHELM'S TROPHY.

*Page 61.*

# A L D A'S LEAP.

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OVER THE STREAM.

*Page 66.*

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T. NELSON AND SONS,  
LONDON, EDINBURGH, AND NEW YORK.

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# A L D A'S      L E A P

AND

## Other Stories.

BY

*THE HON<sup>BLE</sup> MRS. GREEN,*

AUTHOR OF "THE GREY HOUSE ON THE HILL," "JUBILEE HALL."  
ETC. ETC.



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## **C**ontents.

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### **ALDA'S LEAP.**

|                         |     |     |     |     |     |    |
|-------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|
| I. A SORROWFUL PARTING, | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 11 |
| II. A GREAT CHANGE,     | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 24 |
| III. A TRAGIC SCENE,    | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 38 |

---

### **GABRIELLE OF ZERMATT.**

|                           |     |     |     |     |     |    |
|---------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|
| I. STARTLING CONDITIONS,  | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 55 |
| II. THE BUNCH OF GENTIAN, | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 69 |

---

### **THE HISTORY OF CICELY AVERELL.**

|                               |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| I. THE TWO RIVALS,            | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 85  |
| II. THE FORBIDDEN BOOK,       | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 95  |
| III. A WONDERFUL DELIVERANCE, | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | 105 |



# A L D A'S L E A P.

*A Tale of the Vandois Valleys.*

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## CHAPTER I.

### A SORROWFUL PARTING.

AT the foot of the Mount Pirchiriano, some three kilometres' distance from Susa, there stood, two centuries ago, the finest water-mill in Piedmont, belonging to one Jean Iseran, a wealthy man, who loved himself first, his daughter Verena second, and his neighbours according to the grist they brought to his mill.

His father had been a wealthy miller before him, and left his business and his riches to his only son. As long as the oldest inhabitants in the valley could recollect, there had not been a single day that the mill had been idle or the wheel ceased its labour. The

sound of the mill-stream had become more familiar than the song of the birds, and the face of Jean Iseran was as well known as the face of the sun itself.

The miller was neither a fanatic nor a bigot in his own religion. The heretic's corn must be ground as well as that of the monks above in the grim monastery on the summit of the mountain. And this bleak afternoon in January 1655 the miller stood, gloomy and abstracted, at the door of his house, as one Garcino, a rich tanner from Turin, poured into his ears the unwelcome tidings that an edict had suddenly been promulgated in the town requiring *all* Protestants to remove within three days, on pain of death, from the chief valleys of Piedmont.

The news did not please Jean Iseran. The heretics were honest and true in their dealings with him, and paid him well. At least one-fifth of his yearly profits must fall with their fall. He was a far-sighted man, too, this miller, and he could foresee a struggle bloody and long, war and all its attendant horrors; and, not the least in his eyes, the destruction of property and lands, and the laying waste of young corn-fields.

"What wilt thou do with thy brave son-in-law to be?" asked Garcino, as his eye rested with a newly

awakened interest on the figure of a girl seated on a hewn chestnut tree opposite the mill-wheel, but who had remained so wholly absorbed in the perusal of her book that she had not noticed his arrival. "Which will David give up, think you—his religion, or his love?"

"Tut, tut, man; you have an eye yourself on the main chance," laughed the miller uneasily. "Things may not be so bad after all as you would wish me to believe. David is an honest lad. I do not believe they would hurt one hair of his head, even if they had the power. Why, the monks above up in the monastery have been anxious to bring about this match;" and the miller pointed upward to the gloomy building on the overhanging cliff.

"Ay, ay, I daresay; men snare foxes often when it is unsafe to kill them in broad daylight."

"Thou hast the cunning of the fox thyself, Garcino," replied the miller angrily, and turned away into his mill.

Garcino moved down the garden path towards the spot where Verena still remained seated, wholly intent upon her book. His face too was angry and dark as the miller's, but he put on a smiling countenance as he approached nearer.

"Good evening, Verena."

The girl started up, screamed slightly, and dropped the book upon the grass.

"Ah, you frightened me, Garcino; you should not have stolen upon me thus." She stooped and picked up the fallen book, pushing aside the hand that would have assisted her, then reseated herself distantly and resumed her reading.

"You are cold this evening, Verena."

"Yes; the air is growing chilly." She drew her crimson shawl carelessly over her shoulders, but did not look up.

"I mean that your manner is cold."

"I cannot help it if it is," she replied with something of the impatience of a worried child interrupted in its favourite amusement. "If you have anything particular to say to me, cannot you say it at once and have done?"

"I have something particular to tell you, Verena, and a question which I would ask."

"Not the old question," she answered with an almost deprecating sincerity; then, suddenly perceiving as she looked up a kind of gloomy triumph lurking in Garcino's manner, she continued with more excitement, "Tell me quickly what you have to say. If your news and your question are to prove disagreeable to me, which I guess from your manner they are,

the sooner they are heard and answered the better."

"Good: you shall have neither my news nor my question, my haughty young damsel," replied Garcino with a sudden burst of anger. "You will learn them from dearer lips than mine, no doubt, before the day is over; but the news will be none the sweeter," and Garcino passed out through the garden gate into the road.

For a few moments after his departure Verena remained abstracted in thought, with her eyes fixed on a crimson gash in the gray sky, which looked as if a bloody sword had ripped it open; then she turned to her book again, and resumed the narrative which had previously entranced her imaginative mind.

Meantime the rift in the sky became wider and broader, and the sunset glow deepened on all around her. When next the girl looked up from her book, with a blush of triumphant joy on its conclusion, the distant Alps seemed to have caught her rosy enthusiasm. The naked stems of the chestnut trees were like pillars of ruddy gold; and the mill-wheel, revolving in tawny grandeur opposite, seemed to cast at her feet votive offerings of rubies and garnets.

"Oh, would that I could excel even St. Alda, the beautiful St. Alda, in purity and faith!" cried Verena,

with a zealous clasping of the hands. "Would that God might choose me out as a favoured servant and saint." She would have cast herself upon her knees in her enthusiasm, but that there was again a step upon the garden pathway, this time a well-known step; and looking round, Verena saw David Barolo, her betrothed, coming towards her up the vine walk.

An almost imperceptible shadow of pain and hesitation crossed her face for a moment, and then laying her book on the grass beside her, she rose to meet him.

But it was no *shadow* of pain which crossed David's face this evening as, taking both Verena's hands in his, he drew her towards him. It was the very substance of pain itself, the very essence of suffering, which darkened everything around him, and made this meeting with his best beloved a martyrdom in itself. There was hesitation on his face, too, but the hesitation only of a manly heart, which shrinks from inflicting the pain which itself feels on one weaker or less able to endure it.

"Verena," he said, drawing her arm in his, and leading her towards the same spot where she had been previously seated, "let us sit down here, and talk for a while before we go into the house."

"Yes, David," she replied with a quick sympathy,

"we will sit down here, and I will talk; and you must not, for you look pale and tired."

"I am tired of life, Verena, and of its many crosses," he replied gloomily; "and yet," he added after a pause, "we read that the good soldier must endure unto the end."

"Why, you are not going to turn soldier, are you?" asked Verena, with emotion, striving to guess and come at the cause of his sudden discomfiture.

"No, my dearest; I was only quoting a text from the good old Book, the *best* book, Verena, that ever was written, the best and truest, because it was written by God himself."

Verena was silent. She was generally silent when David spoke of this book, which was a sealed one to her; but she tried to look the sympathy she felt for his evident distress.

"O Verena!" he cried passionately, as if his grief had burst loose from the constraint he had hitherto maintained, and rare tears rushed into his eyes, "do not look at me so sorrowfully. Why does God visit with his harshest trials those who love him best? Why were we not reared in the same faith, baptized into the one Church, that we might be blessed and happy in it now together?"

Verena trembled at this sudden and fierce appeal,

and her face became as white as the hand which rested still in David's grasp. At length she answered hesitatingly,—

“ If I knew what troubled you, David, I could answer you better. If it is the difference in our faith, is not the Church always open to receive those who wish to enter it ? ”

David looked away as Verena spoke ; he was ashamed of the tears which clouded his eyes, and yet which could not blot out the pleading purity of her expression.

“ You are the most innocent Eve that ever sought to ruin man,” he said, with a curious gentleness of tone. “ But, Verena, though at this moment it is difficult to feel it, I *know* that my faith is even stronger within me than the love I have for you. It is the proof alone which can test its true value, and that proof I must give to my God this evening, when I say farewell to you for *ever*. ”

“ For ever, David ! no, not for ever. Why, David, what have I done ? what have I ever said ? ”

Here Verena's question ended in a sudden sob.

“ You have said nothing, my love, my heart's darling. It is the decree of fate, the decree of the government, and I must accept it also as the decree of my God. An edict has been published in the town

and all over the country this morning, that within three days every Protestant, of whatever rank or degree, must quit his home and lands and retire over the Alps into certain valleys appointed as places of safety from the sword and the vengeance which in all districts are to follow him even to death."

"They *will* not, they cannot carry such an edict into effect; they have not the power," cried Verena indignantly.

"They have the power and the will and the determination. The government for the hundredth time is bent on our destruction and extermination. Why otherwise have they chosen a time when the valleys are flooded with water, and the snow lies thickly on the hills? Why else do they hunt us into a poor patch of country already overburdened? I tell you, Verena, your kind heart will bleed yet for the sufferings of our Protestant martyrs, and this parting of ours must be not for once, but for ever."

David's voice had trembled so that he could scarcely bring his explanation to a conclusion; but now the moan of pain which burst from the lips of his betrothed filled him with a sense of shame for his own weakness.

"David, David!" she cried piteously, "it is my fault—this sudden separation is my fault. Day and night have I not prayed to my God that I might love

Him better than any one else—better even than you, my David. I prayed not an hour ago that He would make me a chosen saint and servant, and now he whom alone I could love better is taken suddenly from me."

Verena could get no further. She leaned her head against David's shoulder, while with her hand she nervously plucked the bark from the stem of the fallen tree on which she was seated.

"Hush, my Verena; we must not blame God for too quickly or too slowly answering our prayers. Some day, though long deferred, He may answer the prayer of my heart also."

"What is that prayer, David?"

"That the time may come, however distant, when your eyes, my Verena, shall be opened to the truth; and, that casting yourself on Christ and his sacrifice alone, you may throw off the false yoke that now oppresses you; and that we may become one in heart and hope and love. I have brought with me this evening a parting gift, Verena, which for my sake you must accept and value."

He drew a Testament from the pocket of his jerkin and placed it in her hand.

"It is sin," moaned Verena shudderingly, withdrawing her fingers from its cover.

"God knows if it were sin I would not ask you to touch it."

"I dare not."

"For my sake," pleaded David hoarsely, "even for my sake. It is God's own book—it is truth itself."

At this moment there was a splash, and sudden circles of water broke the quiet repose of the mill-dam. Verena looked up and became aware of Garcino's face peering above the garden wall.

"He has seen me, David. I dare not, I dare not touch it."

David looked up also and recognized him whom, for Verena's sake, he dreaded most in the world. He instantly resumed possession of the Testament he had offered her. He was no coward, but he dared not risk by his own gift a life more precious to him than his own. Before, however, he replaced the volume in his jerkin, he tore a few pages from its cover, and folding them up, held them tightly in the palm of his closed hand.

Verena, meantime, had lifted her own favourite book from the ground, where it had lain so long unnoticed, and looking up at David, she urged timidly that though she might not accept his gift, he would accept one from her, even this precious volume of "The Lives and Miracles of the Saints," her most treasured possession.

" May I not also pray for your conversion, my beloved ? " she said in a voice almost below a whisper, fearing she might cause more pain.

David smiled as he took the book from her hand—a kind but incredulous smile. He saw the fear with which she had proffered it, and turned over a few of its pages, where strange woodcuts illustrated the wonderful miracles and stories which it related.

David stopped as he came to one which represented a girl throwing herself headlong from the summit of a precipitous rock.

" There, there," cried Verena excitedly, stopping his hand with hers, lest he should turn further ; " that is the story I read this evening—the story of the beautiful St. Alda, who, committing herself to the care of the blessed Virgin, threw herself from an enormous height into the valley beneath, and came down unhurt. It was into this very valley, David—where the crucifix stands by our chapel wall—from that very rock above our heads, she cast herself down. O David, you could not read that story and remain incredulous in the pity and protection extended to us by the blessed Mother of our Lord. Read that book, David, when I am far from you ; and may she whose love and power it extols turn your heart to accept the truth."

" Pilate saith unto him, What is truth ? " murmured

David sorrowfully, as he looked into Verena's face. "Christ is truth, my Verena; 'there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved;'" and, pressing the pages torn from the Testament into the hand of his betrothed, he took his last farewell.

Verena watched his departure with a sick faintness which rendered her steps uncertain and slow, but presently she turned towards the house. The sunset glow still rested on the distant Alps, the trees, and the slowly-turning mill-wheel, but the thoughts within the young heart were changed. Fear now reigned paramount, and the pictures fancy but awhile ago had suggested were changed also.

The distant hills were flushed with vengeance, the chestnut stems were flaming stakes, and the wheel was the martyr's wheel from which dropped gouts of blood into the gloomy tank beneath.

Verena placed the forbidden pages in her bosom, and, going within the mill, sank like a stone upon the ground.

## CHAPTER II.

### A GREAT CHANGE.

THE unhappy prediction of David Barolo had come to pass. Within a few weeks of their parting, a merciless persecution, unequalled in its cruelties, overtook the poor fugitives from the valleys, and Verena's kind heart had to bleed in silence for the sufferings of Protestant martyrs. Bigotry, like another Moloch, was lifted up in the land, and slew its hundreds; and in the quiet of Verena's country life these human sacrifices assumed an overpowering horror, affecting her spirits and even the tone of her mind.

The early spring came round, with its budding leaves and opening blossoms, but Verena scarcely ever ventured outside the precincts of her father's garden; she fancied, foolishly, that she could hear in the valley the shrieks of flying women, and the wailing of mothers over their slaughtered children. She had worse fancies than these, but she dared not frame them to her mind, lest her reason might slip from its hold.

Her sleep, too, was broken, and her rest was gone from her. Night after night, unable to find repose in her bed, she rose and paced her room, or sat by the window which overhung the mill-dam, chilly and comfortless in the moonlight—looking away to the distant Alps, on whose cold slopes she knew there were motionless forms lying by the hundred. David's father, she had heard (on whose knee she had sat so often, and listened to his pleasant flow of genial words), was already numbered among the ghastly multitude. What must David have suffered ere he watched the spirit go out, whose calm, steady light, had been his guide since childhood! Would not a bitter vindictiveness fill his heart against all of her creed, which must in time extend even to herself? Then, turning from the window, Verena would cast herself on her knees before the crucifix at the foot of her bed, and plead with an erring devotion for the suffering flock which was being driven to and fro amongst the mountains.

But day by day, instead of the persecutions drawing to a close, their horrors increased. Verena heard how in one small village among the hills more than a hundred women and innocent children had been massacred.

Her spirit, pure, loving, and merciful, but de-

votional even to fanaticism, was like a bird in the storm, the mere plaything of the wind. She could not listen to these recitals of wild cruelty and excess without shudderings of heart; but, on the other hand, she might not listen to the rebellious thoughts which arose in her bosom against the authors and perpetrators of these cruelties. She drifted she knew not whither.

Her priests, too, and spiritual directors, who, but a few months ago, had sought to lure her lover to their fold, now denounced him and his religion in words so bitter and vengeful, that Verena, returning slowly from the confessional, felt that if she would gain heaven she must slay this deep love she felt for David on the very threshold of her upward path.

She began to tremble now for her own power of endurance. Her mind as well as her body was growing weak. There were moments when she could scarcely trust her reason or her sight. When she sat in the garden for rest, the clouds overhead took strange and fanciful shapes, as of a stricken multitude, which filled her heart with gloomy suggestions. If she sought to read, the words presented no meaning to her mind.

Once, with a strange impulse, she took the leaves of the Testament David had given her from her bosom.

She believed in tests. She would try if they could give her back her mental vigour. But no ; they were meaningless as the rest. And was not this a sin—this gift of David's—a sin she was hiding in her bosom ? She would test truth again ; she would cast out this sin, this last relic of a forbidden love, for ever.

She crumpled up the pages, and cast them into the mill-dam. Suddenly—yes, this time the test had triumphed—the words which when read a moment before carried no sense to the vacant mind, rose up now from the tank at her feet, and appeared as if written in letters of fire upon the water : “There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved”—a text from the forbidden Book, the last words uttered in her ear by David.

Verena pressed her hands over her eyes, to shut out their meaning, but the words were written within on her eyeballs. She looked again down into the mill-stream ; they were flaming there still. The illusion was so strong, she stooped and threw a stone into the water. Of a sudden, the splash and the widening circles brought back the day of bitter parting, and Garcino's face gazing at her over the garden wall.

"Verena."

With a scream and a sudden forward leap, she had almost precipitated herself into the mill-stream, for it was Garcino himself who touched her on the shoulder.

"What dost thou see in the water, Verena? I warrant there be fish in the stream, but none that will come with money in its mouth."

"What has brought *thee* here again, Garcino, with a foolish speech in thy mouth?" she asked bitterly. "I want neither thee nor thy money. This is my father's garden; cannot I sit here unmolested?"

Without replying, he looked over her shoulder into the mill-dam, and his eyes rested on the torn leaves she had dropped into the water.

"Belike you have lost a love-letter. Barolo no doubt finds means still of addressing thee;" and as he spoke he approached the place where the paper was caught in the sedge.

"Garcino," she cried, in hasty confusion, "come here! I would not have thee take my words unkindly. I have been out of sorts to-day. Tell me, hast thou no news from the town?"

"Ay, you will give good heed to my news to-day. Verena, hast thou considered my words? Thy heretic lover has forsaken thee; but, lo! I am here to protect thee and thy father."

" My father and I are above suspicion ; we do not need thy aid," she said sternly.

" I know not how that may be, Verena ; I know I love thee."

" I am sorry," was all she replied ; but she turned towards the door of the house.

" Verena, you are sorry ! Have you no heart or pity ?"

" No, I have none. I have neither heart nor pity left," she cried passionately, waving him off. " My heart is long since dead, and pity has been murdered."

" Is it even so ?" he muttered between his teeth. " The day may come when you may call on Garcino for aid, and he will reply, ' My pity is dead also.' "

The words fell upon Verena's ear with significance and presentiment. She felt inclined to turn and fly. At that moment the miller, who had overheard the voices in the garden, appeared in the doorway.

" Father, he threatens us," she faltered.

" Dog of a tanner, what brings you skulking about my house and garden ? If a maiden's refusal does not touch thy pride, must I hunt thee forth ? One would think there were skins enough these days to dress to keep thee pretty busy."

" Miller, you shall answer for this. Take care, take care. I may have you ground yet in your own mill,

or baked in your own oven. I have you in my power."

"Big words are not grinding-stones, nor can hot breath fire the oven," replied the miller contemptuously, as he assisted his daughter within the mill.

But Garcino waited till he was out of sight, and stooping down, drew the torn leaves of the Testament to the edge of the mill-dam, and carried them away.

That evening Verena sought peace early in a sleep which seemed to overpower her; but her mind was still feverish and restless, and broken images of danger and hurried flight oppressed her. Again she was anxiously looking for something, which she must find before it came into other hands. It was dear life to her to find it. She stretched out for it, muttering, "None other name under heaven given among men," and woke with a gasp. She then remembered the leaves of the Testament which she had left behind her, forgotten in her confusion and vexation.

"What have I done?" she cried. "Garcino saw it; we are lost!"

She sprang from her bed, and hastily attiring herself, she lit a lantern and went down the staircase in trembling agitation, yet with a noiseless step, careful not to rouse her father. She quickly opened the door leading into the garden, and a bright flood of moon-

light smote her face and figure as she stood there anxious and uncertain. "I will not bring the lantern," she murmured, laying it softly on the bench within; then, half closing the door, she crossed over towards the mill-dam. Everything was ghostly still save the black mill-wheel, with its hoarse splash.

On hands and knees she peered into the water, and snatched at something white. It was only a handful of foam, and her heart sank within her. With hasty steps she traversed the bank backwards and forwards, searching in vain. There was no trace. Garcino had carried it off as a witness against them.

"It is a false witness," she said. "My father and I have no taint; and may the saints keep it from us."

She returned to the house and took up the lantern. Striving to be calm, she sat for a while on the bench, till the flame, heating the framework, burned her tender hand, and the pain at length penetrated her reverie.

As she went up the stairs she paused at her father's door, and looked in softly. The old man was bound in healthy sleep, his white head resting on a brawny arm, the very picture of earthly security and dependence upon self.

"How weak and faithless I am," she murmured; "and he is passing brave and strong. Yet I might

be stronger and calmer than he, with a strength not my own."

She set down the lantern on the floor, and stealing to his bedside, sank upon her knees and prayed fervently that God would bring her into the sweet haven of peace, and lead her among the ways of those blessed women whose lives were written in her brain.

She was for a long time absorbed, with her face buried in her hands, and might unconsciously have passed into sleep, when suddenly the room seemed illumined, and she saw a pale and fair maiden in white garments stand, as it were, on the brow of a cliff, which formed itself, she knew not how, beneath the rafters; and the figure beckoned to her and smiled upon her, and the words seemed to come from a distance,—

"Verena, bid thy father farewell, and come and stand by me."

She gasped, stretched out her hands, and rose to her feet; but the room was dark, the light within the lantern had gone out, and her limbs were numbed with cold.

"Father! father!" she cried, laying her hand on her father's shoulder; "did you not see her?"

"Garcino, I have thee by the throat!" muttered the old man in his half-broken sleep.

"Father, tell me, did you not see her? The blessed St. Alda was in the room with us."

The miller sat up, but, bewildered and cross that she should have disturbed his slumber, bid her return to her bed. "What did she there?"

Verena was too excited to reason with him; her imagination was in a state of ecstasy as she rose to her feet. She looked to see before her on the winding stair, like a guide and comfort, the vision which was but the idle creation of an overheated mind; but all was dark, except the glimmering of the moon through the cracks in the wooden casement.

Still in the same mood, she sat up in her bed, murmuring appeals to the saints for a continuance of their favours, and yearning, yet trembling, at the hope of beholding again the beautiful phantom on the cliff. At length she sank back into dreamless sleep; and when she awoke in the sunny morning, all the events of that night—the splash of the cold water around her wrist, the moonlit garden, and the beckoning vision on the cliff—seemed "the baseless fabric of a vision."

When she rose, the household cares occupied her mind to the exclusion of fantasy; and then when her eye fell upon a withered flower which she had received some time since from David—a flower out of bloom in the present month—her thoughts fell upon him,

his love, and his low, solicitous voice, and above all, his eternal farewell. There was fever in this theme, and it held her mind in the intervals of work during the day.

Her father, indeed, rallied her upon the disturbance of the night, and this gave her a shock of remembrance, rekindling her enthusiasm for a time. But it is hard for the impressions of the mind to contend with waking dangers and waking realities. "If this vision be sent from heaven," she said, "I shall see it again; if that invitation comes once more, I shall obey its call. But let me not leave my father and my home for a dream;" and Verena's eyes wandered off to the distant mountains.

"Verena, my girl, the sun is nearly down. Go into the garden and call the night-miller: I doubt not but the lazy loon is dapping for pike in the mill-stream."

She had been sitting working by the old hearth, and her thoughts were away up the Alps. Her father's command was not unwelcome to her, to go out into the fresh air. It was the half-hour before sunset, when all the land was warm and genial, and the heavy dew had spread the first faint haze over the fields. She crossed the garden quickly and called the night-miller, who was making ready to return; and then, invited by the warmth, the freshness of the leaves, and the hum of the bees returning to their

hives, she sat down upon the bank which skirted the north side of the garden, where the glare of the sunset was lost, and with nothing but cool streaming shadows and a deepening sky before her.

She knew not how long she was sitting there; but it seemed to her that a cliff had risen in the centre of the garden, where there was never a cliff before, and up against the sky a gleaming figure stood, and a voice came to her, "Leave all earthly love, and come and stand by me."

"I will come," she cried; "blessed St. Alda, I will come."

It was a changed maiden who returned to the miller's house. Verena was silent and rapt during supper-time, and would eat nothing.

"Verena," said the miller, taking her hand, "this house has grown dull to thee, and well I wot the reason. He was a good lad our David, and I should rue the day he came to harm. I wish him no worse luck, poor soul, than thee for a wife."

"I do not think of him," she said with a strange vehemence. She paused for a few moments, and her hand trembled in his grasp. "Father," she said, "I have renounced for ever all earthly love. I have taken a vow, and I dare not break it. I must sleep to-night in the convent of St. Alda."

The miller dropped the little hand in astonishment. He expostulated, he reasoned with her ; he argued, even with tears in his eyes, that he would be a lonely, childless old man ; that his riches, which for years he had been gathering, would turn to ashes in his hand.

No : in vain were his words ; the call to be saint must be paramount to the love of father or home, or to the fulfilment of all earthly duties.

But before the next evening had closed in, it seemed well to the miller that his daughter had found refuge for a time within the moss-grown walls of the convent ; for in the afternoon a noisy crowd of surly men and soldiers, headed by Garcino, invaded the miller's house, garden, and mill, and demanded that Verena should appear before them and give account for having had in her possession leaves from the forbidden book.

The miller stood up proudly before the vulgar crowd and denied the charge ; but Garcino drew the leaves of the Testament from beneath his cloak, and told how he had picked them the evening before out of the mill-dam ; and again the soldiers, showing their warrant, demanded that his heretic daughter should be given up to them.

The miller then, looking fixedly into the triumphant and vengeful face of Garcino, gave them this answer : "I will prove now, in the presence of you all,

that Garcino is a liar, and that he has brought this false accusation out of a mean revenge and for a base purpose. The heretic daughter of the old miller Jean Iseran refused the tanner's love yesterday, and to-day she has sought refuge within the walls of the convent of St. Alda, to take upon herself the vows of a nun."

Thus did the old miller, ignorant of previous circumstances, repel Garcino's accusation ; and the tanner slunk away shame-stricken from the reproaches of the crowd, who knew his motives well.

## CHAPTER III.

### A TRAGIC SCENE.

FAR bitterer even than the sufferings of Verena had been those of David Barolo her betrothed. She had dreamt and wept over the recital of cruel deeds ; but he had witnessed them. The screams of agonized mothers and perishing babes had pierced his ears and heart, while only their sad echoes had vibrated in the valleys.

Surprised by their base pursuers in the retreats which had been promised to them as cities of refuge, David, his father, and a few others, had succeeded in making good their escape among the rocks and woods, hoping in a few days, by care and caution, to effect a still further escape across the frontier into that part of the opposite valley which belonged to France. But the hope, so far as David was concerned, proved delusive. Like Moses of old, his aged father beheld in the distance the promised land of rest and freedom,

but might not reach it. The rough gust of persecution, which only fanned the fire of resolution in David's breast, blew out the old man's life. Like Moses, also, God buried him ; but it was in a pall of snow,—snow which fell heavily all that night, and gave to many a poor fugitive a more merciful death than the sword, the stake, or the torture.

Once his father was gone, David no longer thought of flight : he turned his back on the promised land, and with many another brave-hearted Christian resolved to sell his life dearly in the cause of his suffering brethren. Again and again a mere handful of these courageous men repulsed the soldiers as they sought to gain the heights or ravines which might lead them to fresh fields for butchery and carnage ; and more than once in these raids and open sorties David's steps led him back in sight of the valley nestled close under the old walls of Susa,—the valley with its spire, its vineyards, and its clustered cottages,—and even within sight of the silver thread of water which, creeping over the hoary brow of Monte Pirchiriano, fed the mill of Jean Iseran in the valley beneath.

There had been a few who in the false calm which succeeded their retreat to the cities of refuge had ventured back, encouraged by their false lords, to revisit their fields and possessions, and even in some

instances to recommence the tillage of their lands and repairing of their tenements. But David Barolo was not among these misguided few. He did not believe in the false encouragement held out by the Lord of Lucerna, or the false toleration extended to the deputies of the suffering Vaudois. Added to this, deep down in his heart, and hidden from every eye save One, lay the stern resolution neither to tempt nor to endure temptation.

Verena, the miller's daughter, best beloved still of his heart, and wavering, perhaps, in the misery brought about by their cruel separation, must not by earthly love or blighted hopes be led to forsake her creed, erroneous though it might be. God's right hand, and not his, and God's strength, must lead her forth out of darkness into light. And in this right hand and this strength David reposed with unfaltering confidence.

Thus was formed David's fixed resolve not to revisit his lost home; but though God's right hand is all-powerful to protect and save, surely the flesh is weak.

David would not return to see again the haunts of his childhood, the vineyard paths or the sunny mill-garden; yet he thirsted for news of his betrothed, for some tidings of her life, her health, and her daily actions.

While the first panic and flight lasted he heard but

little : vague stories and vaguer reports. She had been seen leaning over the garden wall gossiping with Garcino. He put such idle talking from him with a smile. She had fainted in the chapel when they cursed the heretics from the altar. Ah, this bore the stamp of truth. It was no smile of incredulity this time which shone on David's face ; it was a smile of the sublimest pity gilded with precious hope.

But presently, in the midst of the bloodshed and the flight, and the human havoc among the mountains, came more alarming tidings. Verena was ill, or strangely affected in her mind. She no longer walked pleasantly among the vineyards, but stood for hours in the mill-garden with dull eyes cast down upon the ground, heedless of those who traversed it for business, or of the rough jokes of passers-by ; and at night, unable to find sleep, she had been seen to wander in the moonlight with vacant eye and preoccupied air by the side of the gloomy mill-dam.

A few days later came worse tidings still, and brought to David by no idle tongue, but by a friend long known and trusted. Verena had been accused by Garcino of heretic leanings. Soldiers had invaded the quiet mill-garden, and a warrant had been issued for her apprehension. David's heart leaped up with a fierce feeling which was neither hope nor despair, only

to fall again into the coldest depths of a joyless life. The report had proved almost without foundation. Garcino's accusation had been repudiated ; for Verena, giving up the world with all its future joys and sorrows, had become a nun, and entered the convent of St. Alda.

She was dead to him now,—his betrothed, his much-beloved,—as dead as the countless multitudes martyred on the hillside. This thought was frenzy, and exceeded in misery every other doubt which had been suggested to his mind.

David discovered now, when too late, how much he had counted upon seeing her again, upon her faith to him, her endurance, her quiet patience, her unmeasured love. He did not now, in the first bitter moment of his disappointment, reason out how a shaken religion, a harrowed mind, a broken heart, still ever seeking for a peace which the world could not bestow, had driven her into this false haven.

Sometimes he argued foolishly with himself, had he but returned before this last fatal step was taken, had he but risked one short hour's parley, what words of comfort, truth, and religious consolation he might have spoken. Now her ears, in this living death, were closed for ever against all truth.

Every little token she had ever given him in her

girlish love he looked at now like a relic of one that was dead or lost—the plume of peacock-feathers she had fastened in his cap, the buckle she had bought for his belt out of her own earnings, and her most precious possession which she had given him on the day of their parting, “The Lives and Miracles of the Saints;” and sitting aside under the cover of a rock, David drew the book from the pocket of his jerkin, and tears fell on its leaves as he sought out with trembling fingers that last page, where with her gentle hand she had stayed his, while with a kindling enthusiasm she recounted to him the foolish tradition of the “Leap of the beautiful St. Alda.”

But by-and-by stranger and more incredible news came from David’s old home to rouse him from his lethargy and despair. They said Verena had become a saint, and worked many strange and wonderful miracles. No longer bound within the convent walls, she was carried hither and thither in triumph. They said she saw visions and dreamt strange dreams, and that the beautiful St. Alda was her patron.

This intelligence created in David a desire which grew in a few short days into a fixed resolution—namely, to return to his home and make one last earnest appeal and endeavour to wean Verena from the state of fanatical frenzy on which her fragile mind

seemed evidently bordering. There would be a fearful risk to his own life and a possible risk to hers ; but might he not now, when all other outlets of hope seemed closed, utter one, if even a dying, appeal for the truth ?

Late at night, disguised as a cragsman, with shaven beard and lip, and armed only with a gun, which he took from the rigid hand of a dead soldier whom he found cold and stiff among the rocks, he began his perilous journey homeward.

Though the spring was well advanced, the snow lay thickly still on the unbeaten paths chosen out by David. The climbing was stiff and arduous for one whose strength had been brought to a low ebb by privation and hardship. But there was a fire in his heart which led him on to overcome all the dangers and difficulties in the path of this “forlorn hope.”

The sun had just risen, blazing and gigantic, in the east when David reached the summit of the mountain which overlooked his native valley. The birds were singing among the sweet-smelling pines ; and far away in the distance, under the brow of old Pirchiriano, the bells of the village chapel summoned the early few to matins.

Everything in the fresh morning air breathed and smelt and sounded like peace and plenty and pros-

perity ; yet darker in David's breast at every step grew a sudden unreasoning fear which had taken possession of his mind—a fear that Verena was in danger—that her life, precious and pure, was in peril,—that he must hasten on to her rescue or she must perish.

There were ghastly sights too now at every turn of the road, which told him plainly that peace had been murdered and prosperity was a name of the past,—whole vineyards on the hillside blackened and seamed with fire, ruined cottages, and the bodies of Christian martyrs still lying as food for the wolves and eagles.

As David descended into the more inhabited slopes of the mountain, he became wary in his movements, for there were an unusual number astir at this early hour, and, like himself, pushing forward in the direction of the town of Susa.

He was soon out upon the highroad, bordered by chestnuts now in full leaf, and here the travellers were more numerous still, and eager and excited in their demeanour. They joined themselves into companies of two or three, and argued and discussed as they hurried on. Stranger still, as they drew near the town they branched off also from the broad road and took the way leading to his native village.

David's inexplicable fear increased with the air of

mystery and excitement which was visible on every face. As he approached the well-known vineyard wall which bounded the miller's garden, the chapel bell began to toll with dull, slow beats, like a funeral call ; and between its throbs David paused and listened for the well-remembered sound of the rushing mill-stream ; but this morning, black and grim in its distasteful idleness, the ponderous wheel stood still.

Not a few also among the crowd stopped and pointed across the vine trellises to the house of Jean Iseran ; and David fancied he caught the words, "It was there she lived, poor girl ;" or, "That is the miller's house where St. Verena was born."

At a turn in the road, just where the garden gate emerged upon the highway, he came upon the well-known figure of an old man leaning forward upon the low wall, with his head sunk in his hands. It was Jean Iseran, the old miller himself.

David's heart yearned to stop and question him ; but to discover himself now in the presence of so many witnesses were certain death.

By the chapel gates the crowd was dense, but in the long strip of deep pasturage beneath the shadow of the rocks it was denser still. There was everywhere a heavy odour of incense and the sound of priests chanting solemnly.

At a signal (it was from the bell of the convent of St. Alda on the hillside) the chanting ceased, a deep hush fell upon the multitude, and every head among the crowd was raised upwards, while the faces of women grew white and those of men strangely stern.

"God help her; is she not young and beautiful?" gasped a mother with an infant in her arms.

"Ay, ay; a second St. Alda."

"They call her a heretic," muttered a third with indignation.

"It may be they were not so far wrong," replied a fourth. "She calls this a test of the true faith."

A dread murmur passed through the crowd. David looked up with a shuddering prevision. On the summit of the cliff, between him and the sky, stood a slight, girlish figure, glorified in the morning light. In the features upturned and raptured by her sublime illusion he recognized Verena, his betrothed! There she stood, the victim of superstition and self-sacrifice to the faith founded on the sand.

With a sudden impulse of agony, David called to her; but his voice was drowned in the hum of admiration and applause. If his spirit could that moment have left his body, it would have joined her like a thought, and held her back from her impious attempt.

He saw her stretch out her hands and step to the

very brow of the cliff. His senses swam, and he would fain have withdrawn his eyes, but they were fixed and fascinated. Then like a snow-drift which, sun-touched, glides noiselessly over the edge of a precipitous rock, Verena dropped into the valley beneath.

The mob surged round David and pushed him to and fro; then came a terrible silence, which seemed to freeze the blood in all veins. The silence was followed by a shudder and a groan, whispered words of horror ran round him through the crowd, and saturnine faces that mocked caught his eager eyes.

“Verily a would-be saint.”—“A fit punishment for arrogance.”—“There was something in the tanner’s charge.”

Such were the remarks that were bandied about, for men’s hearts were callous in those days.

David’s senses no longer failed him. A sudden strength was given to him, and he struggled through the crowd towards the base of the cliff.

There lay Verena, or what was lately she, a poor humbled form, motionless, on the spot where she fell. The crowd was breaking up around her already with harsh and unfeeling faces. They were under that merciless reaction which follows enthusiasm—each man angry with himself for his credulity.

It was strange how simultaneous was this reaction. The priests led the way, shaking their heads, and prophesying after the event, "This girl was not of the quality saints are made of."—"They knew it all along."—"She had heretic sympathies."—"She was betrothed to a heretic."—"No, no, not of such a type was the blessed St. Alda."

They melted away, that expectant crowd, and Verena was left all but alone. A few women, indeed, more curious or compassionate, approached the place as they might have done had a poor straying lamb fallen from the cliff overhead. They raised her, but seeing no sign of life they went mournfully away.

Meantime David, who dared not approach till all the people had gone, lurked faithfully near. "At least," he murmured, "I shall close her poor eyes, and lay her body among her people." And at the word "body" he shuddered and pressed his clinched hand to his heart.

But there was another for whom the tragic scene seemed to have an equal attraction. Above the prostrate figure, and casting a shadow over it, stood Garcino the tanner. He also raised Verena's head and looked into her fixed eyes. But at this moment the white lips opened, and a voice as it

were of one returning from the dead uttered these words,—

“None other name given under heaven whereby I may be saved.”

“Wretched heretic!” cried Garcino; “so this is what remains of thee and thine insolence. Thy lot had been otherwise hadst thou not scorned me.”

“Garcino, help me.” Verena’s eyes were fixed upon him in tardy recognition. “Carry me to my father’s house in pity.”

“My pity for thee is dead,” said Garcino, turning and leaving her with a resolute step.

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Around the miller’s dwelling for many weeks there was a sinister watch set. Men who were strangers to the place peered round the house as if searching for some one concealed within. None knew whether Verena was alive or dead. But one clear frosty night a grove of flame sprang up from the old mill, and hissing timbers fell into its waters. Corn was scarce in the country, and the burning mill with its precious store caused great excitement and confusion in the neighbourhood. The miller and his daughter were forgotten in the panic, and these fugitives, under cover of the smoke and consternation, passed away, and took

their flight over the hills in safety. They were Jean Iseran, David his future son-in-law, and Verena his daughter. In her bosom was a clasped book the scattered Vaudois had learned to love, and its texts were written in her heart.



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**GABRIELLE OF ZERMATT.**  
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# GABRIELLE OF ZERMATT.

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## CHAPTER I.

### STARTLING CONDITIONS.

GABRIELLE stood, as was her custom, about four feet back from the beaten pathway, poised on a low rock, listening for the sound of the muleteer's voice or the step of the traveller on foot. She looked brilliant this morning; for the breeze was just fresh enough to heighten her colour and raise her fluctuating spirits, giving her hope that the cloudless sky and the exhilarating air might bring many purchasers for her mountain wares of cream and strawberries, or for little Heinrich's craft of curiously carved wooden ornaments and chalets.

Gabrielle is known by no other name than "Gabrielle the beautiful;" that is to say, in the auberges and mountain chalets, and at the table d'hôte in the

valley, where admiring tourists question their hosts. But the guides among themselves, the hardy mountain muleteers, who earn their bread by honest toil, give her another name, equally truthful—"Gabrielle the coquette."

There is scarcely a guide over that jagged mountain-path whose heart she has not broken, with her eyes so blue and so beguiling, as day by day she has stood on the same morsel of rock since she was seven years old, with the same lovely eyes and waving unbound hair, asking so sweetly, with such courteous grace, "Who will buy my sweet strawberries, my sweet strawberries and cream?"

They made poor Gabrielle what she is, these foolish mountain boors with their great soft hearts: they told her, when she was six, seven, eight, nine, how beautiful she was; they gathered her strawberries on their early morning walks, and gave her rides in the evenings on their mules. They caressed her playfully, and laughed at her air of childish pride and early assumption of dignity; and now they are reaping, in pain, jealousy, and heart-burnings, the fruit of the poisonous seed their own clumsy hands planted in her heart.

But Gabrielle has a better nature, and it is the very knowledge of this which drives them wild, and

makes them envy, even to hatred, Ulrich Valpel, who they fear comes first in her fickle favour.

There is not one of these hardy muleteers who has not heard of Gabrielle as a daughter and Gabrielle as a sister. "On the mountain," they say, "she is a queen," and "in the home chalet beneath the pines she is a slave."

It is not, then, for herself poor Gabrielle stands all the day on the hillside, till her cheek pales and her hands hang limp by her side ; it is not to buy costly combs for her hair or silver chains for her bodice. It is for old Michel Macquinet, brooding over the kitchen fire within, with pinched nose, long gray beard, and trembling hands ; Macquinet, who when he was young blew the great horn on the hillside, leaped the blue chasms in the glaciers, and cut in the ice-walls footsteps for inexperienced travellers ; Macquinet, who brought his gains home in the evening and poured them into the lap of Madeleine, wife Madeleine, rocking poor Heinrich to sleep in her bosom, or listening to the prattle of Gabrielle.

Now the old horn is rotting among the moss and fallen pines, wife Madeleine lies in her grave in Zermatt, the hatchet is on the shelf, the guide-rope hangs useless on its peg, and Michel, old and decrepit, warms his shivering limbs in the chimney

corner, and babbles of the blue sky and God's holy angels.

But it is not for the sake of her father alone Gabrielle stands all day on the hillside; it is for Heinrich, the guileless brother in the chalet ingle,— Heinrich, the love of whom keeps all that is fair and pure alive in her heart—a love born of pity; pity for the poor crippled limbs which must never know the feel of the springing heather—for the beautiful eyes, blue as her own, but larger still, and with that peculiar tearful purity which tells us plainly of a heaven near at hand; pity for the frail, blue-veined hands, which with such unceasing industry carve the sweet-smelling pine wood.

But we must leave Gabrielle “the slave” now, and return to Gabrielle “the coquette,” standing so jantly this morning poised on her ledge of flower-crowned rock.

She has heard the song of the muleteer coming round the hill, fresh and joyous for a fine bright day and work early begun. The colour has come and gone twenty times since she heard it first, she has even wavered whether she will descend and look beneath; but now they are quite close, and the coquette heart is all astir.

Here they come round the corner. Gabrielle lifts

her painted tray and puts on her sweetest smile. A gentleman walking foremost with knapsack, knicker-bockers, and alpenstock, straining up the path with unnecessary zeal. "He is a novice in climbing," thinks Gabrielle, with a little scornful smile as she steps forward. Here comes a mule's head, heralded by a pair of brown, bald ears. The colour mounts again. Nay, it is only old Gobemouche with the broken knees, staggering beneath his female burden. Frantz is the guide—Frantz the miser, who does not give his beasts sufficient food. But Frantz knows his business well; he is ruled by a look of Gabrielle's; he restrains his mules doggedly till the bargain is ended, and then, with an appealing glance for gratitude, he gives the signal for advance.

Here are more tourists: two elderly gentlemen, with blue spectacles and walking-sticks. They do not even listen to her. They pass on, talking of plants and flowers, foreign and indigenous. Gabrielle laughs, but there is just the faintest echo of a sigh as she folds her hands patiently on her velvet bodice.

Now hark! you may know again the advent of a young fresh life and a loving heart. Gabrielle smooths back her wind-ruffled hair, and listens with a blushing pleasure. That song is for her: it is the voice of Wilhelm Swartz, handsome and brave. Wil-

helm has broken hearts too, in his time, but not Gabrielle's. She admires him for his fine athletic figure—for his lion courage. She is proud, too, to be the object of his fiery love; but she has heard stories in the valley beneath which make her doubt his truth.

Here he comes—not round the hill by the beaten path, but over its heathy shoulder. He has no mules this morning; he is going uphill to the mountain inn to arrange for an early start in the morning, on an expedition fraught with exciting danger.

“Good morning, Gabrielle.”

“Good morning, Wilhelm.”

“You will be rich to-day, ma belle; the inn beneath is swarming with the insolent English and their pale-faced wives and daughters. There is not a mule to be had in the town; they are sending up the valley for more.”

“That is well,” replied Gabrielle with a blush, as handsome Wilhelm kissed her hand. “And where hast thou been these three days past, Wilhelm?”

“Where have I been?—ha, ha!” He looked across at the giant Mont Cervin, and laughed loudly and long. “I have been cutting steps with my hatchet in the ice for cowards; I have been tied to a rope's end by my waist to drag the inglorious up to fame; I have been carrying provender for asses. But see—;”

he suddenly stopped, and looking with a curious pride into Gabrielle's eyes, lifted his cap from his head,—“see, my beautiful one! what I have brought thee home—a trophy fit for a queen.” He took a bunch of bright blue gentian from his cap and placed it in her hand.

“Bah! is that all—is that all?” cried Gabrielle with a scornful toss of her head,—“these blue things, which grow beside every common pathway?”

“Ay,” replied Wilhelm in some anger, as Gabrielle tossed the flowers on the grass at her side; “but these flowers grew by no common pathway. Human foot never trod before, and never will tread again, the path where these were gathered. Ah, Mademoiselle Gabrielle, if these dainty feet of thine could have followed me over the glaciers; if these blue eyes of thine could have watched me scale the slope beneath the black wall of the Matterhorn, and snatch them out of the very mouth of death, ma belle, thou wouldst not laugh so scornfully.”

“Didst thou gather them for *me*?” asked Gabrielle, looking up under her lids at the tall Swiss, so handsome in his anger.

“Have I not told thee so?”

“Good Wilhelm, thou must not risk thy life for me again.”

"Ay, a thousand times, and again a thousand times, were it only to hear thee say so softly, 'Good Wilhelm.' Gabrielle, why dost thou seek to torture me? Must I for ever ask an answer to the one straight question, Canst thou love me, Gabrielle?"

"What answer did Marie Bauman give thee to the same question, Wilhelm?—poor Marie Bauman, so good and gentle; or Lucine Heller in the valley, what did she say?"

"Gabrielle, thou lookest like an angel, but thou speakest like a true fiend!" cried Wilhelm in white anger, as he turned down the hill.

"Wilhelm Swartz, stay a moment," cried Gabrielle softly.

"Well, what dost thou want now?"

"Hast thou seen Ulrich this morning in Zermatt?"

"Which Ulrich? is it he with the dark face and the white heart?"

"It is Ulrich Valpel I ask for," replied Gabrielle proudly.

"The same. Nay; I have not seen him since the morning he refused seventy francs to climb the Cima di Jazi—a hill a baby might crawl up without leading-strings! base coward as he is!"

"Ulrich is no coward," cried Gabrielle hotly; but when he was out of sight, and she stood on her dais

again, her cheek burned, and tears of mortification gathered thickly in her eyes.

Wilhelm had said right. All the long morning the mules with their human burdens crept round the hill-side, till the strawberries were all sold, the cream all drunk, and Heinrich's wares disposed of.

Then Gabrielle went home to the chalet beneath the pines, to prepare the mid-day meal for her father and brother, to change her rôle of queen for that of slave, to lift the heavy pine-logs, to stoop over the crackling fire, and spread the humble board.

"Gabrielle," asked Heinrich wearily, "hast thou seen Ulrich to-day?"

"No, not to-day; but he may yet go up the hill this evening."

"It is a week to-day since he has come to see me," continued Heinrich plaintively. "My store of good wood is nearly out. He promised he would bring me some. Dost thou think, Gabrielle, he has forgotten?"

"He is too sluggish, perhaps, to drag his long legs up the hill," replied Gabrielle half beneath her breath.

"Gabrielle, what dost thou say? Dost thou not love Ulrich, who is so kind and gentle?"

"Good Heinrich," said Gabrielle softly, and she

put her arms round her brother's neck and kissed him.

When the mid-day heat was over, and the dinner in the chalet ended, Gabrielle sallied forth again laden with fresh stores ; but her step was less springing than in the early morning, and her manner betrayed a secret discontent.

Wilhelm had called Ulrich a coward, and the scornful epithet was rankling at her heart. Nor was this all. Heinrich had spoken the truth : it was a full week to-day since he had visited their chalet or driven his mules up the hill.

"He thinks he is sure of me, and that he may treat me as he likes," Gabrielle said to herself angrily, as she climbed the slippery heather ; "but I may show him the difference some day. While he loiters in his careless assurance another may bear off the prize,—qui sait ?"

It was true. Ulrich might have married her long ago if he had wished it ; if he had chosen, like other guides, to risk his life on the slopes of the Matterhorn or the frozen precipices of the Jumeaux. But no ; he preferred to drive his sober mules day by day over the safe and beaten pathway, and to receive in return a meagre payment, too meagre to enable him to marry Gabrielle the mountain queen ; therefore those who

would have laid down their lives for Gabrielle called him, in their jealous anger, a coward.

But Gabrielle knew in her secret heart that he was no coward. She knew well the cause of his apparently sluggish indifference. In a chalet, almost on the glacier's brink, lived the mother who had given Ulrich birth, blind, decrepit, and exacting. While *she* lived *he* must live also. For a handful of shining gold, for the pride of a daring exploit, he could not willingly risk the life which God had given him for her support. She knew all this, and yet the coquette nature was so strong within her that this afternoon she could see nothing but his faults and shortcomings.

Gabrielle found plenty of customers again for her fruit and cream, and by eight in the evening the painted tray was empty, the last chalet sold, and Gabrielle had sat down to rest. Then round the hill, leading his patient mule, came Pierre Garten slowly and sadly. He had spare limbs, a sunken face, weak eyes, and a crooked frame, but a heart full of a love as intense as Wilhelm's.

Gabrielle was ever good to him; for when she saw him she thought always of Heinrich in the chalet ingle. She did not tease or wound him, as she did the others, for her pleasure; she spoke gently but pitifully.

" Well, poor Pierre, hast thou had no work to-day, that thy mule walks riderless ? "

" Nay, but she is tired, poor thing; and so am I for that matter."

" Well, sit thee down and rest." She pointed to the grass at her feet. " Tell me, my poor Pierre, hast thou seen Ulrich Valpel to-day in the valley ? " Gabrielle did not mean to wound him, but Pierre started aside from her question.

" Nay ; what should I know of Ulrich Valpel ? "

" He has not come up the hill with his mule these eight days. Perhaps he has gone over the St. Theodore."

" Fear not, mademoiselle," laughed Pierre contemptuously ; " Ulrich Valpel is not likely to place any of his bones in danger;" and loosening his mule's reins from the rock round which he had tied them, he dragged it sullenly up the hill.

Gabrielle turned aside with an impatient sigh.

The evening closed in calmly. The stars were beginning to shine in the pale-green sky, as she descended the hill towards the chalet beneath the pines.

She had reached the small bridge over the stream. Her foot was touching the first mossy plank when she heard a voice calling her ; and looking across, she saw stout, sturdy Ulrich Valpel standing on the opposite bank.

Her face had been pale, almost sad, as she came down the slope ; now, true to her coquette nature, it changed. Her colour rose, her lips pouted, her head was held proudly, and she hesitated to advance.

Ulrich would have crossed over to meet her, but as he stepped upon the bridge she cried loudly in feigned terror,—

“ Ah, miserable ! why wilt thou seek to cross ? Art thou not afraid that the planks may give way and precipitate thee in the roaring water ? ”

“ Gabrielle ! ”

“ Ay, if seventy francs will not tempt thee to climb the Cima, why risk thy precious life for me ? ”

“ Gabrielle, what dost thou mean ? ”

“ I mean that thou art a true coward, Ulrich :—afraid of wolves in the pine forest, of the cows in the pastures, of the grasshoppers in the fields, of a girl selling fruit on the hillside. Which of all these great fears has kept thee from our house so long ? ”

“ Gabrielle, thou art not kind.”

She had crossed the bridge now, and was moving on ; but, standing with his arms folded on his breast, looking down into the puny stream which she had called a torrent, Ulrich made no offer to follow her.

So broad and stalwart a figure, so manly and generous

a face, so true and firm an eye, could scarcely cover a coward's heart.

Gabrielle halted for a moment and looked back.

"Wilhelm Swartz is brave!" she cried passionately. "See what he gave me." She tore the blue gentian from her bosom and hair. "There! when thy coward feet have followed him to the slopes beneath the black Matterhorn, when thy coward hands have plucked flowers such as these out of the very jaws of death, thou mayest see Gabrielle again, but not till then."

Without once looking round, Ulrich crossed the bridge and passed through the pine trees out of sight.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE BUNCH OF GENTIAN.

GABRIELLE did not return immediately to her home beneath the pines ; her hasty passion was not over; the coquette fever had not cooled down. She could not go in and sit by Heinrich's bed while her head felt so feverish and her heart so full of pain. She must wait and seek to justify to her own mind the bitter words she had spoken ; and yet, where was this justification to be found ? She walked round the brow of the hill, and sat down on a grass plateau overlooking the glacier in the valley. She knew well how Ulrich loved his mother—the feeble, complaining Marie Valpel ; how twice a day, were he ever so weary, he turned his mule's head down the glacier road, to give her with his own hands her morning and evening meal ; and how even Gabrielle's love could not tempt him to let his poor blind mother spend the comfortless evening alone. She knew all this, and yet tonight, with her own lips, which ought to have

spoken words of gentle sympathy, she had taunted him almost to despair—perhaps even, foolish girl, to worse.

Gabrielle, after a time, rose from the plateau and turned homewards; but her cheek was still hot, her eyes still angrily bright, when she lifted the latch and walked in.

Old Michel Macquinet was asleep: his head was drooping forward on his breast, his gray beard reaching almost to his knees; the fire-light shone red on one cheek, giving it a false appearance of freshness and youth; while star-light, cold and true, falling on the other side, painted with pale-blue shadows the wrinkles of decay and time.

Heinrich was not asleep—he was sitting upright in his bed; and through the gloom and the flashing log-light Gabrielle saw tears upon his cheeks and in his eyes. Instantly the passion of the moment disappeared, and crossing the room, she laid her cheek against his caressingly.

“ Heinrich, dearest Heinrich, has Gabrielle left thee too long alone? hast thou been waiting sadly for her return ? ”

“ Nay, I have not been alone—Ulrich has been here; he sat by me for two long hours. Poor Ulrich ! ”

"Why dost thou call him *poor* Ulrich? He is only poor because he chooses to be so."

"Gabrielle, did he not tell thee?"

"Tell me what?" asked Gabrielle quickly.

"Did he not tell thee poor Marie Valpel is dead?"

"Marie Valpel, his mother!"

"Yes. Ulrich went down to meet thee at the bridge to tell thee all."

Then Gabrielle, rising suddenly to her feet, opened the chalet door and went out. She stood on the same plateau of rock overlooking the glacier valley. All was serenely still as a moment ago; but now she cried loudly down into the silence and star-light,—

"Ulrich! Ulrich! Ulrich, come back!" "Come back," cried the distant glaciers, taking up her words. "Come back to me!" But he whom she summoned with such piercing accents to her side gave no answer.

It was too late to go down to the valley even had she wished to follow him to the chalet, where Ulrich and Death were keeping to-night their silent vigil. No; she must return to her home and bear for a long night the pangs of a miserable remorse.

Slowly she went into the chalet again, and drew

her spinning-wheel beside Heinrich's bed ; she let its drone serve for a conversation which she had not the heart to sustain. She could not explain to guileless Heinrich the thoughts which were causing her such pain ; nor could he understand a love which could prompt Gabrielle's sweet tongue to wound, and sting, and torture, to drive almost to madness him whom she loved the best.

That night Gabrielle slept little, for "her heart was disquieted within her." The creaking of the pines outside made her start and tremble, and she felt oppressed with a sense of solitude and distance. At midnight she had a short dream of horror, from which she started with a cry. She had been witness in her sleep to a quarrel between man and man—a wrestle for life and death between Ulrich Valpel and Wilhelm Swartz ; a struggle all the more fearful as they strove on the edge of a precipice as straight and high as the black wall of the Matterhorn. In vain, with spell-bound lips, she had striven to speak words of peace or loosen the clasp of death, till, with a cry which shattered the delusion of her dream, she beheld Ulrich cast headlong from the height into the abyss.

Gabrielle could sleep no more. She watched by the window till the stars began to fade out of the sky, and the mountain-tops to enter their brief period

of rosy sunlight ; till the cows with their tinkling bells came down the pasture to the chalet door, and the goats bleated lustily outside for the hands of their mistress. Then, with a listless, sad gait, she rose and dressed for the day's work. She milked the cows and the goats, but this morning they missed her joyous song, and the handful of welcome provender. When the frugal meal was ended ; when her father was seated again by the log-fire and Heinrich had been lifted to his corner in the ingle ; when the cream had been gathered from the dairy and the fruit from the hillside,—Gabrielle, with face pale as the now fainting snow-slopes, and eyes red with weeping, took her usual place on the rock by the way-side.

Pierre Garten came down first this morning from the inn on the summit of the hill ; the mule not riderless to-day, but picking its way carefully over loose stones and red earth, till it halted, as was its custom, at Gabrielle's feet.

But Pierre was surly this morning,—he struck the poor beast with his thick staff and bade it move on. He would not have looked up at her, but that Gabrielle called him softly—

“Pierre.”

Pierre Garten had a kind heart and a quick eye ; he noticed at once the pale cheek and the fast-rising tears.

" Well, mademoiselle, what ails thee ? how is the boy in the chalet, and thy father yonder ? Neither ill, I hope ? "

" No, good Pierre ; but if thou couldst find it in thy heart to render me a service—"

" Ay, can I ? The greater the service the greater the pleasure to me. Speak only, ma belle, and it is done."

Gabrielle hesitated. She knew her message would give pain. She was seeking for the best words to convey it.

" Pierre, if thou shouldst see Ulrich Valpel in the valley, tell him I would speak a few words with him —a few words before the evening."

Pierre's countenance fell ; he looked on the ground gloomily. " Nay, nay, I did not bargain for such an errand, Mademoiselle Macquinet ; I doubt that my tongue would prove a false messenger. Good morning, ma reine ;" and Pierre followed his mule sulkily round the corner. But Gabrielle knew Pierre's kind heart, and trusted that he would fulfil her errand.

How wearily the sun crept up this morning, each hour seeming longer and longer, as no answer came to her message ! At length it seemed to stand still in the heavens above her head, while the grass scorched, and the grasshoppers sung, and the tourists swarmed

round the hillside, uttering compliments into her ears which to-day sounded foolish and fulsome.

Ulrich did not come.

Those who knew Gabrielle well saw that to-day there was something much amiss: there were no sly glances watching them coming up the hill, or following them as they descended; no tossing of the dainty head or pouting of the lip. Subdued, unexcited, even mournfully, she sold her wares, now and then casting frightened glances towards the glacier valley.

Again, in the afternoon, she went home to the chalet, and prepared the dinner for Heinrich and her father, returning even sadder and paler.

In the evening, when the last tourist had gone up the hill, and again the stars were creeping into the primrose sky, she heard a voice calling her; and looking round, she saw Pierre Garten coming over the brow of the hill, red and heated, mopping his gaunt face with his yellow handkerchief.

“ Well, good Pierre, what news ?”

“ Yes, I am good, no doubt, mademoiselle; but my news is bad enough, as far as thou art concerned.”

“ How so ? he has refused to come ?”

Gabrielle’s cheek burned with a momentary shame.

“ Nay, not so fast ; thy thoughts run swifter than my mule to her oats. Thou must have patience, and

give me time to breathe ; I have come up the hill at double speed to please thee."

" Yes, good Pierre ; sit thee down and rest, but tell me only what answer gave Ulrich to my message ?"

" Well, since thou wilt know the truth, there is no need to garble it. I saw *not* Ulrich Valpel. His mother is dead ; the door is locked ; the house is silent ; and Ulrich is gone since nightfall."

" Where ?" asked Gabrielle between her white lips.

" Nay, how can I tell ? They know nought in the valley, save that he stopped at Kirkman's door, by the inn, and giving him the key of his house and some money, said, should ought prevent him from returning, he desired they would give his mother a decent burial."

" Pierre, lend me thy arm," cried Gabrielle faintly.

What an evening walk that was for poor Pierre, down the burnished slopes and beneath the pine shadows, with the mountain queen leaning like a tired child confidingly upon his arm ! but the pleasure was not unmixed with the acrid heartburn of jealousy. Gabrielle bade him good evening at the chalet door, with a sad humility which made his rough heart ache ; but she did not invite him to enter or rest his tired limbs by the fireside.

Heinrich saw plainly to-night that his sister was

miserable. He watched tear after tear drop on her velvet bodice ; but still with her foot she kept up the monotonous drone of the wheel, and he knew it was again to avoid conversation. Only once he sought to probe her grief.

“ Gabrielle, hast thou seen poor Ulrich to-day ? or has ought happened to grieve thee ?”

Gabrielle started back from the wheel, and said impatiently, “ Heinrich, canst thou not leave me in peace ?”

She had never spoken so roughly to him before, and Heinrich lay back on his pillows silently.

But at night, when the chalet was still, when her father and brother were both sleeping, Gabrielle, filled with a sudden resolution, rose from her bed, and, dressing herself, went into the empty kitchen. She hastily struck a light. She took down Michel Macquinet’s hatchet from the shelf, the old guide-rope from the peg, and the lantern from the pine-wood press. For one moment she seemed to hesitate as she placed her finger on the latch ; her eyes dilated in a sudden pain ; she laid down the hatchet and rope, and turned towards Heinrich’s room.

“ Heinrich, dearest Heinrich, say good-night to Gabrielle.”

“ Good-night,” answered her brother sleepily.

"Say God bless thee, Gabrielle, and watch over thee."

"God bless thee, dear Gabrielle, and watch over thee;" and, with this charm in her ears, she went out through the chalet door, and began the rapid descent towards the valley.

It was at Pierre Garten's door she stopped and knocked, Pierre Garten's chalet by the brink of the torrent. He could not hear her at first for the noise of the waters.

"Who is there?" cried the surly voice from within.

"It is Gabrielle—Gabrielle Macquinet."

A head enveloped in a white cotton night-cap peered for a moment through the window, and presently the door was opened.

"Gabrielle, nay Gabrielle, ma pauvre, what brings thee here at this hour?"

"Pierre—listen to me, good Pierre. Thou must come with me now at once up the glacier. See, I have brought a rope, hatchet, and lantern. We must not delay, or we shall be late."

"Up the glacier, my angel? surely thou art but awaking from thy first dream. Wouldst thou have me lead my beautiful queen to her death?"

"Yes," cried Gabrielle. "I would go to the same

death to which I led Ulrich. Pierre, if thou wilt not come at once in search of him, I go alone."

"To where? to which glacier? I know not in which direction to lead thee."

"To the snow-slopes beneath the black wall of the Matterhorn."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Pierre Garten, as one would laugh at the foolish prattle of a little child; "I have no regret to walk with thee a while beneath the stars, to carry thee over crevasses, to cut steps for thy pretty feet in the frozen snow, but after a while, little one, we shall turn back."

Pierre busied himself making the necessary preparations within, and after a time, which seemed to Gabrielle a year long, they crossed the torrent together and began the toilsome ascent.

Pierre soon found that Gabrielle was in earnest. She spoke not a word, but treasured her breath with a cautious zeal. She would answer no question, listen to no remonstrance, only follow doggedly where he led. The sky was perfectly cloudless, the stars unusually brilliant, and when they first stepped upon the snow they found it firm and hard from the sharp night-frost.

Here Pierre made a valiant resistance against further progress; but Gabrielle treated him with scorn,

and with her own hands fastened the guide-rope round her waist. The first faint yellow glow of morning found poor Gabrielle struggling over the moraine, still full of a faithful courage, but weak and trembling. At four o'clock, when the crest of the towering Matterhorn was bathed in ruddy flame light, she was upon the glaciers. The sunlit air had given her fresh courage. She was leaping the narrow crevasses, or waiting impatiently for footsteps to be cut in the ice.

"We must be near the snow-slope now," she cried, pointing to a vast white field of snow, seamed with the tracks of lately fallen avalanches. "Was it not to those Wilhelm Swartz led the English?"

"Ay, but mid-day will not find thee there, ma pauvre, nor midnight, I fear. It is impracticable; the dangers are too great. Remember, thou riskest both our lives. Think of thy father, Gabrielle—think of poor Heinrich, so young and so helpless."

Gabrielle burst into tears. "Hast thou brought me so far, Pierre Garten, only to desert me now?"

Pierre never could withstand a woman's tears. "Courage," he cried—"courage, ma belle;" and again they continued their perilous way.

It was mid-day when they reached the foot of the snow-slopes. Gabrielle was growing faint, and her courage had almost failed her, when Pierre, suddenly

cried "Halt," pointed with his finger before him. "There, yes, there truly is the mark of Ulrich's foot in the snow; I know it as well as I know my own mule's hoof. Alive or dead, we must find him presently. He has taken, poor fool, the track to the very spot where Wilhelm made his death-climb."

"Death-climb!" gasped Gabrielle.

"Ay, surely, for Death kissed him almost on the cheek. Didst thou not know how an avalanche wind carried the very cap from Wilhelm's head as it swept past him in his mad folly?"

"Pierre, what is that?" asked Gabrielle in a voice so strange and terror-stricken it made him start aside. "What is that, Pierre, up yonder, in the broken snow?"

"A rock fallen from the precipice," cried Pierre, shading his snow-blind eyes.

"Nay, but that blue thing yonder?"

"A bunch of flowers, ma belle.—Why, Gabrielle, with thy voice and thy white face thou wilt rob me of the little strength I still possess. Thou must hasten on, wench; thou standest in the very track of the avalanche."

But Gabrielle, hastily disentangling herself from the rope, had plunged into the crumbling snow, and, down on her knees, with miserable cries for help,

beside the dark mass which Pierre had called a rock, clasped to her bosom a hand, white, cold, and stiff, which held in its grasp a blue bunch of the fatal gentian.

“ Ulrich, Ulrich, my beloved !”

The crest of the Matterhorn seemed to fall with a sullen blackness and roar into the glacier valley, the ground to glide from beneath her knees, the white hand to drag her down a blue abyss ; but through the darkness and noise and faintness she heard Pierre’s voice roughly kind in her ear:

“ Nay, Gabrielle, my heart’s love, thou must not die here in the cold snow. See ! Ulrich thy lover still lives.”

\* \* \* \* \*

On the snow-slopes beneath the black wall of the Matterhorn, in the presence of danger—almost of death—in the thankfulness for a great mercy shown to her, for a great love given back to her, the last spark of the coquette nature died in Gabrielle’s heart ; and in Zermatt Valley, in the red chalet, among the corn-fields, there is no happier wife, no more contented husband, than Gabrielle and Ulrich Valpel.



THE

# HISTORY OF CICELY AVERELL.





# THE HISTORY OF CICELY AVERELL.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE TWO RIVALS.

IN one of the quaint old towns not far from London—old even at the time my story begins—in one of its narrowest streets, there stood, and stand even now, two tall houses facing each other,—two houses which must have been built and designed by the same head and hands; for the queer wood-work and traceries on the outside are exactly similar, and the pillars, carved with the same uncouth faces, support, at equal distances, the galleries above.

In far back olden days they may have been intended for the dwelling-houses of twin-brothers, who wished their terrestrial abodes to bear the same

resemblance as their physical features. But it is certain, at the semi-modern time of which I write, in the year 15—, they were not inhabited by brothers, nor even by friends, but by enemies, bitter, unsparing, and keen.

The house on the right-hand side of the roadway, as you come out of the main street of the town, belonged to one Simon Averell, a weaver, an industrious, hard-working, but bigoted Roman Catholic. The one on the left-hand side, to Cornelius Harrison, a weaver also, but a Protestant, or so-called “heretic.”

Thus rivalry of trade and rivalry of religion combined drew a cordon invisible to the eye, but palpable to the senses ; and hearts throbbing and burning with passions, with fierce envy, or fiercer triumph, toiled on all day, and lay down to sleep at night, within houses at whose windows friends might have chatted neighbourly, or across whose narrow street friends might have almost wrung the hand of brotherly love.

For many years Cornelius Harrison had thriven and grown lusty on the profits of his trade, while Simon Averell, always spare and meagre, grew more shrunken on his declining gains. This had been during the years of the Reformation, and the reign of the good young king, when the Protestant shop drew its hundreds of customers and the Roman Catholic its tens.

But a persecution, which true Protestant religion could never teach, and which must have been dictated by a love of power or gain, brought its own punishment; and in a day the whole face of the country underwent a change—a change which not only affected the great city with its great statesmen, but our small town and its humble occupants.

Upon a day—a notable day throughout the land—the bells of the chapels rang great triumphant peals. There were royal proclamations in the name of a new queen, which spread consternation in many a peaceful home. Processions of surpliced priests moved through the streets, and a great and evil joy seized on old Simon Averell.

His shop was crowded with rich and busy customers; his son and daughter were clothed in costly garments of velvet and satin, and walked openly to mass. But this was not all—this was not the root of the evil joy; it was the ruin of the twin house opposite; and day by day he muttered feverishly to himself, as he glanced across the street at the closed shutters, “It is my turn now; ay, ay, it is my turn now.”

One evening he went out, and did not return till the next day, when he appeared flushed and excited, as though he had done some successful stroke of business. He did not sit down in his shop, however,

or attend to his customers ; he was observed to fumble among old papers and parchments, and finally, ascending to one of the upper rooms of his house, he drew his old arm-chair to the window, as if to watch some event which he had prepared—some train he had fired.

“Richard,” quoth he to his son in a shrill whisper, ‘Time, the requiter, is slow. I did not think to live to see this day, but it has come ! it has come ! Shut up the shop, my boy, and watch with me.”

About twilight came strange men, accompanied by the constable of the town, to the door of Harrison’s house, and beneath his very eyes he saw his aged neighbour dragged out of his doorway, thrust into a cart, and ignominiously carried away towards the county jail.

Simon sat and watched it all at his window ; and when they were gone, and the street was silent, he still sat and watched, as if the struggle in the doorway were going on yet. An hour passed, and still he eagerly watched, bending forward ; and the sky, and the street, and the room darkened upon his vigil, till his son, going up to call him to supper, found him dead and nearly cold !

Richard Averell, his son, gave him a costly funeral, and paid large sums for the peace of his soul, and

Cicely, his daughter, grew paler and more thoughtful.

Old Harrison never returned to his home. He died in prison three months after they had buried his old rival; and it is said that the bones of these implacable enemies now lie side by side.

He bequeathed nothing to his son John but his blessing and the small stock of woollen goods remaining in his house; for he had lived well and open-handedly during his prosperity, expecting to leave a thriving business behind him.

John Harrison was an only child, born when both his parents were well stricken in age; and his mother had died with the smile on her lips which welcomed him into the world. And a handsome boy he was, with pale, almost sallow face, and eyes dark and thoughtful.

Cicely Averell, in the house opposite, when she was still a child, and incapable of understanding petty jealousies, fierce rivalries, and religious feuds, had thought it no sin to peep through the close-latticed panes of the upper window across the narrow street at Master John Harrison, learning painfully and industriously to read on the broad wooden sill opposite.

She had even once been known to throw her ball across when both lattices lay wide open, and strike

John Harrison, her should-be young enemy, on the cheek. Her ball, being made of soft gleanings from beneath her father's loom, did not hurt, neither did she intend that it should do so; but her brother, coming in at the moment, had smitten her on the cheek with his rough hand, which did hurt, and had shut to the window with a bang which made the leaves on the white roses outside on the window-sill tremble.

Cicely was terrified for the moment, but not discomfited. She threw no more balls across, but she threw glances by the score—coaxing, loving, innocent glances—and waved her dimpled hand at the "heretic."

The said young heretic or reformer had, up to this time, scarcely noticed the child opposite, or only thought her wild peals of laughter or foolish fits of childish anger a wrong and a hindrance; but from the day her ball struck him on the cheek, and he saw the harsh blow given, an interest, at first boyish in its revengeful curiosity, and afterwards manly in its passionate love, was aroused within him.

John Harrison was an only son and an only child, and, according to the general rules in such matters, not a little spoiled. His word was law; his whims were studied; his temper, somewhat dogged and obstinate in its nature, yielded to; and all his father's

gains—which in his prosperity were not a little—lavished unhesitatingly on the son of his old age.

Had John lived in our days, he would, no doubt, have lived and died a sober-thinking book worm; but in the times of which I write—happily long past—there were few books wherein to burrow, and perilous became the fate of him who studied with too much care the one obtainable book—the Bible.

This latter book, at a great expense to himself, John's father had purchased for him; and often, when darkness had covered the old city, and the streets were silent,—when Cicely Averell knew, by the muffled sound of the loom beneath, that her father and brother were at work, the little girl stole from her bed in the darkness to watch the pale boy, with hands thrust up through his hair, bending over his book, and following slowly the black lines across the page, on which the rushlights shone flickeringly.

One night, her father and brother being out, and Judith, the servant-of-all-work, having gone down to count the linen in the laundry, Cicely made very bold, and opened her latticed window wide. The moon was streaming on the red-tiled roofs, and shining down into the narrow streets; but John was reading as usual, and his face was turned from her.

She called to him, at first in a diffident, childish key, scarcely above a whisper; then in a shriller, more complaining tone; and finally, taking up some clay in her fingers from the rose-pot on the sill, she flung it across at the window.

This had the effect desired. John turned his head slowly round, closed his book, and, walking over, opened his casement. "Eh, little wench, is it thou? What dost thou want, that thou didst rattle at my window? Art thou not afraid thy loonish brother may strike thee again?"

"Nay," replied Cicely, with a dainty toss of her head, "I am not afraid, because he is gone out, and cannot hear me. What book art thou reading, lad?"

"The Bible," replied John; "and a rare good book it is."

John might talk fearlessly of his Bible now, for the lurid cloud of Queen Mary's reign had not as yet cast its shadow over its pages.

"A rare good book, and one it behoves thee well to read. Canst thou read yet, my little lass?"

Cicely shook her head mournfully.

"Then thou must go and be scholared, and after a while I will lend thee this book of mine."

"Father is too poor," murmured Cicely disconso-

lately ; and then suddenly closed her casement, hearing footsteps beneath upon the galleries.

From this time out Cicely constantly besought her father that she might learn to read, until at length he sent her to an aged man, a priest, who was a scholar, and who owed him, long time past, for a bale of fine woollen goods ; and thus it was arranged that his daughter's teaching should go in part payment of the debt.

During this time there were many stolen conversations at the window, and Cicely recorded her progress in the art of reading with a boastful simplicity, or listened to grave theories and vague suppositions propounded by her neighbour, interspersed now and then with a sweet word of encouragement or praise.

All at once these conversations were brought to an end. Cicely having opened up one of John's favourite theories and arguments to her teacher, and quoted a text in its support, she was asked for the origin of such heresy. At first she hesitated, but being naturally timid, he forced her by threats to confess. Then the priest, hoping thereby to gain a further remission of his debt, hurried to her father and laid the matter before him.

Simon Averell, infuriated with his daughter, forbade her, under pain of his curse, to hold any further

communications with the son of his heretic enemy ; and also put an end to her learning, blaming himself that he had ever allowed her to be taught or had given way to her foolish fancies.

Cicely obeyed dutifully, and came no more to the window, though John Harrison watched night after night for her coming, and angrily guessed at the cause which hindered her.

John Harrison was a man now, with pale, almost emaciated face, fine brown eyes, and pointed beard ; and Cicely was grown a fine young woman, with hair bright as the summer sunshine and eyes blue as the summer shadow beneath it. But her priest had taught her the meaning of the word "heretic," and to love John Harrison the heretic was sin.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE FORBIDDEN BOOK.

IN the year 1553 Queen Mary was crowned, and fires began to blaze in Smithfield, and darkness and danger to hang over all professing the Protestant faith. Then, as we have learned before, there came a great change over the twin-houses in the old town near London, and all was reversed.

The shop of Simon Averell was crowded with customers, and his son held his head high, and his speech was overweening. Then came Death, the leveller of all things, carrying the old men to their graves ; and none remained of the families but John Harrison, the heretic in the closed shop opposite, whose windows were curtained from scrutinizing eyes, and Richard Averell, tall and handsome, and his fair sister Cicely.

By-and-by these latter were forced to take an additional man—one Edward Pierce—into their ser-

vice to attend in the shop ; for Richard became much mixed up in matters of Church schism and persecution of heretics, and was obliged to travel backwards and forwards to the great city to give evidence and so forth.

One evening it chanced, her brother being away and not likely to return for some days, Cicely threw open her casement. The weather was hot, and she stood looking out with her white hands folded on her satin bodice and her mind in a deep reverie. She loved her own religion well, but not with the fanatical intolerance of her brother. She heard with trembling fear the enemies of her faith denounced at the altar, and listened with tearful eyes to the history of their cruel deaths and shameful tortures, praying all the time in her innocent heart for the safety and conversion of John Harrison, her opposite neighbour.

She stood there this evening with the summer sunset resting on her cheek and satin dress, full of pity for him who had been rich but now was poor, and who, buried within his curtained room, durst not let in the pure light of heaven or look the bright sun in the face.

She strained her eyes if by any chance she might catch a glimpse of his figure through the closely-woven curtain, that she might throw him one glance of pity ;

but failing to do so, she moved at length wearily from the lattice, and going down, sought the company of Judith in the kitchen, inviting her for a walk in the fields which lay a little distance south of the house.

When she returned, an hour later or more, and had shut herself up in her room for the night—for the conversation of the new apprentice downstairs had become wearisome to her—she found with great amazement a book resting on the window-sill between the two flower-stands of roses. The covers were curiously cut, and solid silver clasps held them close. She opened them with misgiving. On the broad page was much writing in a man's careful hand, and the text was emphasized in places with earnest scores of the pen. At the top was printed in large black letters, "The Gospel of St. John."

"A Bible!" she gasped; and the blood left her cheek. "Who put it here?"

She stood gazing at it, with her hands dropped beside her, as if afraid to touch the forbidden page; but as she looked she read. The breeze entered and softly turned the leaf over with a rustle, and presently she sat down and began to search the pages. Ere she finished, it became for her a precious and secret discovery, and she jealously hid it away till the next evening, and the next. She was cautious, and

often started at some sound as of one approaching. Yet was her pleasure tainted by the pain of doubt and fear. She needed some one to reconcile these new doctrines with those in which she had been brought up. But it was in vain to long for such a monitor. There was only one whom she durst question, and his very name was under a ban in her home.

At length, driven by her suspense and anxiety, she wrote a few questions on a piece of coarse paper, and tossed it across the street, in the hope that it would rest on the opposite window sill. But her aim was bad or her hand unsteady, and, rebounding from the wall, it fell into the street. Looking in great fear from the window, she saw Edward Pierce come out from the shop beneath, and lifting up the missive, go back hastily with it into the house.

From henceforth Cicely knew and felt that all her actions were watched and noted down by the wily apprentice. Indeed he gave her pretty clearly to understand that he had her in his power, and that if she would not listen to his soft speeches, she by-and-by would have to hear that which she would not like.

Cicely's spirit chafed under this treatment. She had scarcely a moment when she could read her book; for Judith, on pretext that there were rats in her room beneath, had brought her bed into the upper

room and slept there; but at times she slept so heavily and snored so lustily that Cicely in the gray morning light could steal a few moments for her precious study.

At length, to Cicely's great joy, Judith one morning, giving out as an excuse that it was a holiday, said she was going to visit her old father in the country, and that the apprentice was also a-going out a-pleasuring with his own people. She bade Cicely be good and prudent, and not venture down if one knocked at the door or sought to enter.

Then Cicely, the house being as still as death, opened wide her casement, and setting John Harrison's book on the table before her, began to read, and diligently too, so that she knew not how the hours went by, till there was a resounding step in the room behind her, and she felt a heavy hand laid upon her shoulder.

Cicely looked up from her book with a start to find she had been betrayed, and that her brother stood over her with a scowl that foreboded more than a common outbreak of anger.

He lifted the open book from before her with an imprecation, and smote her twice on the face with its hard wooden binding, then flung it across the room, so that, striking against the beams overhead, it fell

with its leaves in sore confusion on the top of an old and dusty chest.

"So, wench, thou wouldest turn heretic? I know thy ways, and yonder lying knave shall answer to me for this. Thou thinkest that I will not denounce thee because thou art my kin; but if I catch thee again at this wickedness, thou shalt for certain share the fate that awaits thy devil's tutor."

"What is that?" asked Cicely with awakened spirit.

"Thou shalt burn."

"And if I were to burn, I know no better cause," she said with uplifted face.

"Answer me! answer me!" he repeated, shaking her with unbrotherly violence; "art thou a heretic, or not?"

She was silent, and persisted in her silence.

Then Richard stamped on the ground till the old wooden boards trembled, and, shaking his hand at the closed window opposite, poured forth a torrent of threats against John Harrison, calling him many vile names, and promising with oaths to bring about his speedy destruction—oaths which Cicely well knew he had it in his heart and power to accomplish.

She made, however, no offer at intercession, nor sought to deny that her faith in her creed was shaken.

Her proud spirit was grievously wounded at the treatment she had received, and at the trap which, she felt sure, had been set to ensnare her.

Richard, finding all arguments useless, returned to his first and most terrible threat, and swore with a solemnity that left no loop-hole for after repentance, and with a voice purposely raised to a loud and violent key, that if she would not give up her new-fangled notions, and false, heretical theories, he himself, before the week was out, would bring her before the authorities of the great city of London ; and then, if imprisonment, torture, failed to make her recant, she should perish miserably, as hundreds had perished before her.

When he was gone, Cicely raised up her head, and passed her hand over her bruised and bleeding cheek. She looked across the street at the curtained window, with a scared, appealing glance ; then paced her room with clasped hands, and meaningless, hasty steps, for life was young and sweet still to the poor girl, and the thought of death most terrible. She tried to open the door, but found it locked ; then looking through a crack in the wooden framework, she perceived Edward Pierce set in guard over her door, and smiling to himself over her fruitless efforts. She hurried again to the window, and looked down into the narrow street.

Her face was becoming almost wild, and her thoughts ran forward to her threatened fate, like a horse that has lost its rider.

There was a knock at her door. She turned round quickly, and heard Pierce's voice in low tones addressing her.

"Mistress Cicely, say, I pray thee, if there is any way I can be of service to thee, and, if it be possible, I will accomplish it for thee."

"Let me out then; quick, I say."

"Nay, nay; that I durst not do. But if thou wilt, I can take a message from thee to Master Richard which may appease his wrath, and perhaps turn him from his purpose. And if I speak my own words, and say that which seemeth best to my own mind, then need it not touch thy conscience in any manner."

Cicely turned disdainfully from the door.

Thus the days passed heavily on. She partook of almost no food, and went from deep gloom into sudden fits of terror. As the evening of the last closed in, her nerves gave way. She threw herself on her bed; she rose again and flung open her casement. Could no one in the street outside save her? But the street was as silent as death; not the sound of a step or the echo of a human voice.

"Must I die? Must I come to this dreadful end?

Can no one save me ?" she screamed to the dead wall and curtained window opposite.

Pierce heard her cry without, and called to her once more, and fear for a moment made her yield her attention to his words ; but while she listened to his oft-repeated overtures, there was a grating sound at her window of something being pushed forward on the stone outside. One of the white-rose pots rolled upon its side, and threatened to fall inwards with a crash. It was well Edward Pierce was pre-occupied with his own entreaties, for in another moment the casement was darkened, and John Harrison entered the room !

He beckoned Cicely towards him, and pointed to the perilous bridge by which he had crossed over, a bridge consisting but of two rough planks coarsely joined together.

" Art thou afraid ?" he whispered.

She clung to his arm, but made no reply.

" Cicely, dear heart, thou joy and love that God has given me, art thou afraid to go with me and share my lot ?"

And she, looking up in his face, said quietly, " I am not ; I will share it even unto death."

With a perfect trust in him from that moment out, she suffered him to tie a handkerchief over her eyes

and lead her across the few steps which measured the perilous bridge.

Scarcely had she passed in safety to the opposite house, when Pierce knocked loudly at her door, bidding her make ready, as her brother was saddling the horses in the court-yard. She gave no answer, nor, though he placed his eye to the fissure, could he discern the dim outline of her figure. At ten of the clock, Richard, accoutred for travel, and with a face black as midnight, the more so to frighten his sister to the uttermost, strode up the creaking stairs. The moon was shining bright and clear through the open window on the worm-eaten boards at his feet, but Cicely Averell was gone. Either Pierce had proved a false jailer, and she had fled into the fields or open country for safety, or, wild with fear, she had made a perilous entry into the opposite house.

The first supposition Pierce on his knees denied with perfect sincerity; and the second proved the more probable, for the white roses on the window-sill were bent and pushed aside, and the glass in the casement was broken.

The horses which Richard had saddled and prepared were now employed to scour the country in search of the fugitives; for John Harrison was gone also, and the old twin-house deserted.

## CHAPTER III.

### A WONDERFUL DELIVERANCE.

THE search proved fruitless. Week after week went by, month after month, and at the end of two long years Richard began to see that in his fanatical zeal he had outstripped the bounds both of brotherly love and religious discretion.

Vague regrets for the lost sister's love haunted him, dim misgivings for having pushed a pure young soul into a step either desperate or dark, and secret hopes that at some day, perhaps not far distant, she would steal in under cover of the old roof, and ask for a brother's protection.

But not one feeling save revenge arose in his breast for John Harrison, the traitor heretic. The opportunity long sought for came at last, and unexpectedly.

Walking one evening in the suburbs of London, where he had for some weeks past taken up his residence, he noticed a figure turn down a side lane lead-

ing behind a brewery into a covered close beyond. There was something so timid and fearful in its gait that his suspicions were aroused, and he withdrew into the shadow of an empty vat to watch more closely. After a moment of hesitation, the figure opened a side door leading into the close, and passed inside. Presently came four or five men, who, walking stealthily through this brewery-yard, passed in at the same door with the same wary gestures and noiseless, gliding steps. Then Richard, coming out of the darkness and wrapping his cloak about him as the others had done, followed after them, and boldly entered the shed.

At first, so great was the darkness, he could discern nothing save the figure of a man somewhat raised above the level of the ground, holding a candle in one hand and a book in the other. The light fell full upon his face, which was pale even to ghastliness, and the features were those of John Harrison.

Richard's entrance had either not been observed, or his appearance had attracted no suspicion; so he seated himself on the ground as a listener, and gradually observed head after head shaping itself out of the darkness, and men and women's faces bent eagerly forward to catch the words which fell from the teacher's lips.

Richard soon saw enough to satisfy himself that he

had stumbled on a nest of “heretics,” and that he had also now within his certain grasp the enemy he had so assiduously sought.

He went out noiselessly, and going up the lane to the main street of the suburb, he summoned with haste the constable of the town, four or five soldiers, and a dozen or more of his friends. These latter surrounded the building, while the soldiers, with bill and bow, guarded the doorway.

Then Richard Averell walked boldly into the middle of the group, and going up to the bench on which stood John Harrison, still holding the Bible in his hand and reading aloud its contents, he blew out the light, and seizing his enemy by his gown and throat, dragged him through the terrified congregation into the lane outside. The rest, numbering two or three and twenty, were soon made prisoners within or caught by the soldiers at the doorway ; only one woman, with a child in her arms, rushed with a wild cry from the grasp of the man who held her, and passing through the dark intricacies of the brewery-yard, made her escape.

Nine long weeks Richard waited in the great city for the trial of John Harrison to begin, that he might bear witness against him ; but then he was fain to return to his own home, for his business was fast

declining under the careless management of Edward Pierce.

The mob in London had begun to shudder at the number of burnings, hangings, and quarterings which had taken place within the city, and to sympathize openly with the victims, so that the bishop durst not for a while make a fresh holocaust.

Meantime, Richard dismissed Pierce from his service, and set to work to purchase fresh goods and to beautify his shop ; for, miserable and lonely at heart, he still vaguely hoped for the return of his lost sister.

The twin-house opposite grew daily more gloomy and desolate-looking as its brother grew fresh and clean. No one ever went in and out of its doors save the lonely old woman who from time immemorial had been the servant of the Harrisons.

Marvel, therefore, seized upon Richard Averell when, standing one morning at the window of the garret through which his sister had passed in her despair, he heard the ringing laugh of a child within the room opposite, and saw for one instant the curtain withdrawn by a dimpled baby hand, and followed by the vision of a baby's face.

Both were withdrawn at once, and he could trace the figure of a woman bearing the child away ; but

the face remained for ever on his mind, like the ghost of his lost sister Cicely come back to haunt him.

The child never appeared at the window again; nor for a month was there any further stir in the old house, till one night, lying in his bed with his window open, for the air was close, he heard the sound of a woman's voice singing plaintively, and the wail of a child in pain. He arose and looked up at the casement high above his head. A few inches had been opened to let in air, for he could hear between the verses of the hymn which the woman was singing her soothing words of comfort. All night Richard listened with straining ears, but towards morning both the wail and the song had ended.

The next night Richard made no pretence of going to bed, but watched hour after hour in the darkness. Towards early dawn he saw a light for a moment carried across the room opposite, and then blown suddenly out. A few minutes later there was a creaking sound of the shop door beneath being opened, and two figures, carrying something between them, glided along the covered gallery down the street. He guessed their sad errand, and determined to follow them at a distance, to see the matter to the end.

But he was late, and ere he gained the level of the street and crossed over, they were lost to sight.

At length they came in view again, this time walking with less agitated steps. The first was the aged servant of the Harrisons, who clambered up the steps of the gallery, with the iron key of the house-door in her hand. She tottered hurriedly past; but when the second figure drew near, Richard stood up across her path and stopped her. "Cicely, come home with me: you must come back to the old house to-night."

Cicely stretched out her hand to clasp one of the pillars which supported the building above, and leaned against the balcony.

"The old house!" she said, with a kind of piteous look at the twin-house opposite; then laying her hand on her brother's arm, sorrowfully she said, "No, Richard; my child is gone from me, and I have no further wish to be in this world. I must even now make my way to the city, and there end my days with him who first taught me the way of life."

Richard again besought of her to come back with him; but she was not to be moved from the fixed purpose which she seemed to have formed in her mind—a purpose which her brother could not comprehend aright, as his evidence up to this time had not been produced against her husband.

It needed but small evidence in those days to bring poor wretches to their death.

The next day, openly, Cicely hired a horse, and took the road towards London. She seemed afraid of nothing now—of neither pursuers nor death. Richard insisted on accompanying her, and rode by her side, marvelling for what exact purpose she made so hurried a journey.

That night they slept at an inn near unto the east end of the town, and Cicely was up by four in the morning, and resumed her way on foot. She seemed to know it well, for she threaded the narrow streets with a feverish haste, which kept her brother at a distance.

Richard soon became convinced there was something unusual going forward in this quarter of the town, and began to guess its origin, for people were already beginning to file down the alleys which led to the Smithfield market-place.

Here his sister's steps slackened, so that he overtook her; and she leaned upon his arm, for they could see as they entered the open space, through the foggy air, and over the heads of the surging crowd, the stakes already erected for the new heretic sacrifice. Nearer still as they approached they could distinguish even the forms of the victims.

"I see him! there—there he is!" she cried, pointing with her finger over the crowd. And she tried to free her arm from her brother's grasp.

"What wouldst thou? Art thou mad?" he cried. "I will not have thy blood, too, at my door!"

But she broke from him, and struggling through the people till she stood almost within the circle, exclaimed, with upthrown arms, "Make way, prithee, good people; make way, that I may see him, for I, too, am a heretic!"

The crowd opened, and let her pass on; but rough men seized her when within a few feet of the stake, and, obeying the orders of their officials, dragged her across the fagots and out of her husband's sight.

The groans of the sympathizing crowd rose high: but higher still rose Cicely's appeal and protestation—"Good people, prithee, let me die with him, for I, too, am a heretic!"

The order was given to put the fire to the fagots. A recantation had been indignantly refused by the victims, when, as the torch was actually being lighted, a messenger rushed to the priest's side, and whispered some wild words in his ear.

"Hush!" said the astonished priest in a low tone; "I tell thee we stand on a mine, and thy message is fire!" That whisper was taken up by the nearest,

and passed about through the crowd, till at length there arose a shout, "The queen is dead! the queen is dead!"

A number of dark figures rushed in and closed up the void space in a moment. The fagots were tossed in the air, the prisoners unbound, and the kindling fire trampled into darkness. The reign of blood was ended!

\* \* \* \* \*

The twin-houses still stand opposite each other. But before Cicely's life was closed, the old Bible had been lifted down from the dusty shelf by the same hand that had cast it there, and the households had become of one mind and of one faith.

THE END.



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